

with it. Nothing else would do. I had to get wet. Romeo and Tim were threatening to throw me in.

I closed my eyes and waited for it to end. I knew I was being unsociable. I couldn't help it. For one thing, my back was badly sunburned last weekend, and now it was peeling.

A weak excuse, admittedly. Besides, I'm really a very modest guy. I don't want to undress in front of all the girls. I'm shy.

And then, there's my grief. How can I explain that to them? How can I explain that I don't want their beer, their sandwiches, their swimming pool, their sunny day, their secretaries in bikinis.

Around five o'clock it got cool and they let me go home.

CATS

Raymond Chandler was a lush but he liked cats. I've got several books with his picture and he's always puffing on his pipe and stroking a cat. You'd think with all of his hardboiled talk he'd be smoking Camels and have a dog, a bloodhound.

Jack Kerouac was another alcoholic. God, he loved his cat. He just wanted to hide out with his bottle and his novels and his beloved cat. One of the last photos of him shows him all bloated and sad and out of focus, holding his cat.

We all know Charles Bukowski has done his share of drinking. But I'll be goddamned, I never thought he liked cats, until I was looking at a book of pictures taken while he was touring in Germany. There he is, playing with a cat, feeding it a scrap from the dinner table, lifting it up by the front paws. Then,

I read in his latest book of poems that he's got three cats at his San Pedro home.

Don't tell me that Fante also has a cat, I don't want to hear it.

What about Henry Miller? Any cats in his life? (Other than his first wife, I mean. Or was it his second wife, the one who caused him so much trouble, and that he wrote all of that stuff about?)

I'm not having any trouble with the booze part, but I can't seem to come to terms with the cats. We have four of them, and I hate them all. Once in a while, when I'm really tired, I find myself petting one, and I think, You're slipping, you're being nice to a cat.

Then other times, I think maybe this one cat in particular, a black furry one we call Michigan, is the reincarnated soul of Jack Kerouac, come back to haunt me. And I have to be kind to it, after all, it could be Jack.

They sit around the living room, on top of my \$150 stereo from Sears, on top of my books, my records, my papers, like they own the place. They do own the place. I'm the guy who pays the rent, buys the cans of beef and liver, the bags of kitty litter. Maybe I'm stuck with them.

When I start actually liking them, I'll know I've made it as a writer.

-- David Barker

Salem OR